

Morgan Brake

National Wildlife Refuge

photo: USFWS



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photo: Mike Kelly



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1977.
- Acres: 7,381.
- Directions: 3 miles north of Tehula, MS to the east of Highway 49E.
- Located in Holmes County, it is 3 miles north of Hillside NWR and 10 miles south of Mathews Brake NWR.

Natural History

- Situated along the ecotone of the Mississippi alluvial plain and loessal hills in the biologically and culturally unique Delta region of Mississippi.
- Large moist soil management and cooperative farming program attracts in excess of 50,000 ducks annually—as many as 150,000 historically.
- Diverse habitats include bottomland and upland hardwoods, cypress sloughs, reforested areas, croplands, and abandoned catfish ponds.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- No staff. Administered by Hillside NWR which is also responsible for management of Mathews Brake NWR and a 285-acre disjunct fee title tract (FmHA transfer).
- Budget of \$1.6 million shared by entire Yazoo NWR Complex which includes five national wildlife refuges totaling 77,000 acres and 42 fee title tracts and conservation easements totaling 12,800 acres.

- Annual visitation is 140,000.

Refuge Objectives

- Provide resting, nesting, and feeding habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds.
- Provide for a diversity of habitat for all resident and non-resident wildlife.

- Protect endangered and threatened species.
- Provide opportunities for wildlife-oriented recreation and environmental education.

Management Tools

- Moist soil management.
- Water management.
- Wetland restoration.
- Cooperative farming.
- Reforestation.
- Law enforcement.
- Controlled public hunts for population management.
- Exotic plant and animal control.
- Research and surveys.
- Education/interpretation.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hunting.
- Fishing.
- Wildlife observation and photography.
- Environmental education and interpretation.

Calendar of Events

(fishing open year-round in certain areas)

January: waterfowl, archery for deer, squirrel and rabbit hunting.

February: rabbit hunting.

May: Migratory Bird Day.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week, archery for deer, squirrel and rabbit hunting.

November: archery for deer, waterfowl, squirrel and rabbit hunting.

December: muzzleloader for deer, waterfowl, squirrel and rabbit hunting.

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Questions and Answers

What does the refuge do with all the catfish ponds it acquired?

The 55 catfish ponds, totaling over 850 acres provide a diversity of excellent wildlife habitat and are managed in a variety of ways. Some are drained to create mud flats for dozens of shorebird species. Some are managed as moist soil units, and some are cooperatively farmed, primarily for waterfowl. Some are left to grow up in trees and shrubs, creating ideal heron and egret rookery habitat. Some are rented out to a local catfish farmer who provides the funding the refuge lacks to maintain the ponds and their levees. A few are kept at full pool to provide public fishing opportunities.

What is all of the farmland for?

Wildlife. There are 1,200 acres on the refuge that are dedicated to the growing of wildlife-benefitting crops such as rice, corn, soybeans, milo, millet and wheat. Local farmers complying with strict refuge guidelines on low pesticide use and other biologically friendly farming practices, keep 75% of the crop and leave the refuge's 25% share in the field, mostly for over-wintering waterfowl.

Why are there only three people stationed at Morgan Brake NWR?

Actually, there is no staff on Morgan Brake NWR, yet the responsibilities and opportunities there could justify its own staff of four to six people. The current funding level is inadequate to provide for the needs of this refuge. Hillside NWR's staff of three people also must manage Morgan Brake and Mathews Brake refuges, an overwhelming task that leaves a great deal of needed work undone.

How much land has the refuge reforested?

Over 1,000 acres has been replanted with acorns or seedlings of native hardwood tree species to help restore the diminishing bottomland habitat and reduce overall forest fragmentation.